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Foreign Affairs: What Moscow Lost

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Although, for political reasons, the Soviet Presidium has started to rearm the shattered Arab states, it is logical to assume that Soviet economists and Soviet Marshals are arguing for caution.

Weapons deliveries are again under way to Egypt, Syria and Algeria and it is already a fortnight since the Yugoslavs reported that 100 MIG's had been shipped to Egypt under a crash program. The question is just how open-ended that program will be.

Sticking With Nasser

The Russians, it seems, have decided for the nonce to stick with Nasser as Number One Arab and to try and restore his fading ascendancy in Yemen. From there a Cairo-Moscow partnership hopes to establish a keystone position, controlling the Red Sea and outflanking Saudi Arabia.

But such a political move requires massive new military investment. Although accurate estimates cannot yet be made, it is a good guess the U.S.S.R. lost over \$2-billion in equipment

misused by the Arabs and captured or destroyed by Israel.

Prior to the new crash effort, Russia had already sent (before June 5, 1967) the following matériel to Egypt, Yemen (Egypt's puppet regime), Syria, Iraq, Algeria and Morocco:

Tanks (more than 2,500 with 1,400 going to Egypt); assault guns (more than 230 with 150 to Egypt); field guns (more than 130 with more than 100 to Syria); mortars and howitzers (more than 950, mostly to Syria); armored and unarmored personnel carriers (about 2,000, with more than half to Egypt); bombers (about 200 with more than half to Egypt); fighters (almost 700 with perhaps two thirds to Egypt); helicopters (about 80, with more than half to Egypt); submarines (9 to 12, all to Egypt); other air and naval craft (mostly to Egypt, some to Syria), and various other equipment including (only to Egypt) between 10 and 25 SA-2B (surface-to-air) missile batteries.

This represents a formidable investment, largely not repaid. An appreciable chunk of it, Egyptian and Syrian, has been either destroyed or captured by Israel. Obviously, Soviet fiscal

and economic authorities cannot be enthusiastic about replacing lost Arab matériel on anything like the same scale. Soviet bankers are quite as tight-fisted as bankers in the capitalistic West.

The bonanza discovered by Israel on abandoned battlefields enables it to reinforce its own strength while reselling obsolescent arms to underdeveloped lands. For years it has made such resales to countries such as Burma. This helps Israel's budget and helps make friends among noncommitted nations with U.N. votes.

Apart from glum appreciation by Soviet economists of the cost of resupplying Arab armies, the Marshals must be peculiarly distressed by one signal event in Sinai. This was Israel's seizure of six SA-2B missiles intact with launching ramps, electronic equipment, radar, computers and guidance systems.

The Guidance Systems

The Russians base most of their existing antiaircraft defenses on this latest SA-2 model. French sources claim the U.S.A. made two unsuccessful and highly secret efforts to obtain access to guidance systems

of SA-2B's furnished by Russia to North Vietnam and also to test its range and accuracy by taunting flights off northeast Siberia.

Pierre Clostermann, French air ace of World War II, recently told Figaro Littéraire that Soviet antiaircraft defense east of the Urals, as well as that of main cities including Moscow, relies on the SA-2B. He seems to assume their loss to Israel will allow the U.S.A. eventual access to these missiles, helping devise methods to outwit them.

Caution Is Key

One may therefore logically conjecture that even if Moscow's Presidium overrules economic and military objections in order, for political reasons, to start a large new Arab armed program, it will take more care about giving its clients the latest weapons.

And if one adds the possible need to start rejiggering the whole Soviet antiaircraft defense system, ultimate financial costs to Moscow must be formidable. One may hope these combined factors will induce restraint when it comes to rearming the Middle East.